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Special report by Freedom House

Note by the Secretary-General

Addendum

I. Background

1. At the first part of its 2000 session, the Committee had before it a complaint by the delegation of China against Freedom House, on the grounds that the organization had invited anti-China elements to hold a panel discussion directed against the Government of China, and had requested and obtained interpretation provided by the United Nations for that meeting. The organization was requested to present a special report on its activities at its June 2000 session.

2. At the second part of its 2000 session, the Committee had before it a special report and a response from Freedom House explaining the incident. The Committee also heard the representative of the organization on the matter. In addition, a number of delegations requested clarification concerning the work of the organization, including its structure and decision-making mechanisms, its links to the Government of the United States and its financial structure. The Committee deferred consideration of the complaint to its 2000 resumed session, pending the receipt of a response by the organization to questions posed by the Committee.

3. At its 2000 resumed session, the Committee had before it a letter from the secretariat of the Commission on Human Rights and a letter from the organization, both concerning the above-mentioned incident, as well as a response by the organization to the questions posed by the Committee. A number of delegations raised additional questions on the activities of Freedom House and stated that the organization carried out politically motivated acts against Member States (see E/2001/8). The Committee decided to defer consideration of the status of Freedom House, pending receipt of a special report on the role and activities undertaken by the organization in Cuba and clarification to questions posed by the Committee members.

4. At its 2001 session, the Committee had before it a special report submitted by Freedom House (E/C.2/2001/3). This report included a general introductory part on the organization as well as answers to specific questions posed by Committee members. One delegation expressed its dissatisfaction with the report, which it considered not in line with the Committee's procedures and practices, and asked that a detailed special report be requested of the organization. The Committee decided to request Freedom House to submit a detailed special report at its 2001 resumed session about its activities carried out in relation to Cuba, particularly its activities inside the country, including those of persons who had been sent by the organization to Cuba. The report should also include the criteria followed by the organization to designate

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and accredit its representatives to the meetings of the subsidiary bodies of the Economic and Social Council (see E/2001/86).

5. The Non-Governmental Organizations Section of the Department of Economic and Social Affairs of the Secretariat transmitted the request for the report to Freedom House. In a letter dated 9 October 2001, the organization sent the special report, which is reproduced below.

II. Special report submitted by Freedom House

Introduction

Freedom House was established in 1941 by a committee of prominent citizens of the United States who were deeply concerned about the growing threat of world fascism. From the outset, Freedom House functioned along rigorously non-partisan lines. The two people most prominently associated with the founding of Freedom House included a leading Republican, Wendell Willkie, who had opposed Franklin D. Roosevelt for the presidency in 1940, and a leading Democrat, Eleanor Roosevelt, the wife of the President. Freedom House was established as an organization committed to the expansion of human rights and the promotion of democratic ideals. Its founders saw Freedom House as an organization that would rise above partisan political debate by dedicating itself to the advancement of universally recognized standards of human rights and freedom. Indeed, both Wendell Willkie and Eleanor Roosevelt strongly supported the establishment of the United Nations, and Mrs. Roosevelt played a critical role in the formulation of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, a document that serves as a guide and inspiration for the daily work of Freedom House.

It is fundamental to the mission of Freedom House that it function independently of the Government. Freedom House has often criticized the shortcomings of democracy in the United States. It was a sharp critic of Senator Joseph McCarthy and the phenomenon known as McCarthyism. Freedom House was a leading champion of the struggle for racial justice, and worked closely with organizations like the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People and individuals such as Bayard Rustin and Roy Wilkins, who spearheaded the civil rights struggle. Internationally, Freedom House supported democracy advocates who were oppressed by both right- and left-wing dictatorships. Among those receiving support from Freedom House were Kim Dae Jung, Corazon Aquino, Vaclav Havel, Andrei Sakharov and Aung San Suu Kyi.

In June 2000, Freedom House was the co-sponsor of the World Forum on Democracy in Warsaw, at which over 300 non-governmental leaders, statesmen and scholars participated and at which United Nations Secretary-General Kofi Annan spoke (see www.fordemocracy.net).

Freedom House is dedicated to the promotion and monitoring of human rights and examines the current practices of all countries in the world, including Cuba, in a number of publications. In the *Freedom in the World* survey, published since 1977, Freedom House assesses the degree to which sovereign States adhere to universally recognized standards of political rights and civil liberties. In addition, Freedom House issues reports detailing the state of world press freedom and freedom of religion around the world. In all our surveys, the freedoms enshrined in the Universal Declaration of Human Rights serve as the foundation for our evaluations of human rights and political conditions in the United States and in other countries. In evaluating the condition of freedom, Freedom House rigorously applies the same standard to all countries, whatever their political system, ethnic or religious composition, or region might be.

Freedom House programmes

Freedom House sponsors a wide variety of programmes aimed at the promotion of human rights, democracy and freedom of expression throughout the world. The Cuban Democracy Project is thus not a special, stand-alone undertaking, but rather one programme among many efforts aimed at the expansion of democracy and the strengthening of free institutions. Our democracy-building projects include the following:

- The Visiting Fellows Program, which enables young government officials, journalists and others to work at counterpart institutions in the United States;

- The American Volunteers for International Development programme, which recruits United States citizens with special expertise and skills to provide volunteer consulting advice to government institutions and the press in new democracies;
- The Bosnia-United States Business Exchange programme, which promotes the sharing of United States businessmen's experience with entrepreneurs in Bosnia;
- The Regional Networking Program, which supports the development and cross-border cooperation of think tanks in Central and Eastern Europe;
- The Latvia Naturalization Program, which assists the Latvian Naturalization Board in public outreach and education;
- The Romanian Transition Government Support Program, which enables the sharing of experiences on government communications, press relations and organizational management;
- The Partnership for Civil Society programme, which promotes the growth of non-governmental organizations in Serbia;
- The Partnership for Reform in Ukraine programme, which strengthens public policy institutions and think tanks in Ukraine;
- The Reintegration and Leadership Development in Serbia project, which strengthens relations between Serbia's new democratic leaders and their counterparts in the United States, with a special emphasis on the development of non-governmental organizations;
- The Polish-American-Ukrainian Cooperative Initiative project, which builds upon Poland's successful experience in transition to democracy to provide assistance to new democratic institutions in Ukraine;
- The Strengthening Human Rights and Rule-of-Law in Algeria programme, whose goal is to strengthen rule-of-law and human rights protection by working to improve non-governmental organizations and free media in Algeria;
- The East Timor Human Rights Support Program, which supports human rights, accountability, and justice through on-site human rights training;
- The Uzbekistan Human Rights Defender Support Program, which seeks to strengthen human rights defence work through on-site training.

Cuban Democracy Project

In addition, Freedom House for a number of years has sponsored a project to promote information-sharing and person-to-person contacts in Cuba. Freedom House has a long tradition of encouraging the creation of more democratic space for those who are advocating human rights and individual liberties in undemocratic societies. It is our experience that those who have participated in successful transitions to democracy can convey an important message to those who are today involved in advocating increased freedom. Our Cuba project encourages experts from societies that have experienced transitions to democracy to visit their counterparts in Cuba and to discuss the lessons from past peaceful and democratic transitions.

It is a basic goal of Freedom House to promote discussion between democracy advocates in Cuba and their counterparts from societies where political transitions to democracy have occurred. Over the past 25 years, the world has experienced a massive democratic transformation that has reached into every region and every culture. The societies that now embrace democracy, pluralism and the rule-of-law range from Latin American countries once governed by the military to East European countries under Communist rule to Asian and African societies ruled by various types of dictatorship.

The goal of the Freedom House Cuba programme is to enable people who have participated in these transformations to share their experiences with individual Cuban citizens. As individuals who have experience in political transitions that were carried out without violence or major upheaval, these visitors have important insights about the process of change when dictatorships give way to democratic systems. These visitors do not encourage the use of violence, covert operations or any direct or indirect tactic to foment popular upheaval. They travel to engage in ordinary person-to-person contact with ordinary Cuban citizens.

The Cuba Democracy Project is but one of a broad array of projects sponsored by Freedom House in countries throughout the world. Freedom House has a long history of promoting democracy and political freedom in closed societies or in societies that are in transition from authoritarian rule to some form of democratic governance, ranging from Chile to Poland to South Africa to the Russian Federation.

Freedom House in closed societies

The countries in which we sponsor democracy projects differ widely as to their political systems, degree of openness and attitudes to democracy. These differing attitudes to democracy and openness play a crucial role in determining how we relate to a particular Government. In countries that have committed themselves to democratic change, Freedom House works in an open and cooperative fashion with the Government towards the goal of strengthening civil society and reinforcing new democratic institutions.

In these countries, we often conduct exchange programmes, whereby government officials, civil society representatives, journalists and others can visit the United States and work directly with Americans who are involved in their particular profession. We also recruit American professionals who commit themselves to work as volunteers in new democracies and societies in transition to apply their special expertise to the construction of fledgling free institutions. We conduct these programmes in a completely open and transparent fashion, and in turn receive the approval, and sometimes the enthusiastic support, of the government.

We also conduct our work in a completely open and transparent way in societies that are still in transition to democracy. In these societies, Governments at times support the projects we sponsor and in some cases take a less enthusiastic attitude towards our work. But the relationship is one of openness and candour on both sides, and Freedom House is able to fulfil its mission without harassment from government officials.

On occasion, Freedom House carries out projects in closed societies. For example, during the period when Communist regimes ruled throughout Eastern Europe and Eurasia, Freedom House supported democracy advocates in the Union of Soviet Socialist Republics, Poland, Hungary and other countries where political dissent was treated as a crime against the State. We also maintained contacts with advocates of political change in South Africa. Our role in these countries was to provide moral support to individuals who often felt persecuted and isolated. We also maintained a project to provide books on democratic and freedom themes to people living in closed societies. In no case did Freedom House encourage the overthrow of Governments, create organizations or conduct any activities that would not be regarded as commonplace in an open society. Furthermore, the democracy advocates with whom we worked were in every case people dedicated to the peaceful transformation from totalitarianism or authoritarian systems to democracy. Our work in closed societies was, and is, guided by our commitment to the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, and especially its guarantees of open communications between peoples of differing societies and cultures.

Freedom House would prefer to conduct its Cuban Democracy Project in the cooperative fashion that guides our work in other societies. We would welcome dialogue with the Government and citizens of Cuba. The cornerstone of our Cuba programme is the conviction that contact and dialogue between ordinary Cuban citizens and democratically minded citizens of other countries will make an important contribution to peace and international understanding and will hasten the full integration of Cuba into the world community.

In its presentations to the Committee on Non-Governmental Organizations and in propaganda publications, the Government of Cuba has repeatedly accused Freedom House of collaborating with the intelligence agencies of the United States with the purpose of fomenting revolution in Cuba through covert means. Thus a recent publication issued by Cuba's delegation at the United Nations Commission on Human Rights in Geneva was entitled: "Freedom House: Government Organization at the Service of the CIA". The charges of Freedom House collaboration with intelligence agencies are entirely false. The Central Intelligence Agency is not in any manner involved in any aspect of the Cuba Democracy Project run by Freedom House.

The primary source of funding for the Cuba Democracy Project is the United States Government's Agency for International Development, although Freedom House is solely responsible for the objectives and planning of the project and for its administration.

The Cuba project is not "secret", it was initially announced by President Bill Clinton at a meeting sponsored by Freedom House in 1995. The fact that the project was publicly announced by a United States President and was subsequently discussed in the United States media is a clear indication that this is not a conspiratorial, hidden, subversive, spy-run undertaking, as has been alleged.

Criteria

Freedom House participants in the Cuba Democracy Project are highly qualified and recognized professionals with expertise in various fields. All share a mature perspective on the process of political change, and are deeply committed to the democratic idea and to peaceful political change driven by the will of the people. They participate in the project as volunteers, motivated by their desire to make a positive contribution to Cuba's future. Most participants, we would point out, come from countries with which Cuba enjoys normal diplomatic relations. Nor do participants in Freedom House's project receive briefings from United States intelligence agencies or any government entities. They arrive in Cuba largely with whatever information they have obtained in their own country, and with their own conceptions of the Cuban reality.

The Cuban citizens that Freedom House participants visit can easily be identified through various web sites on the Internet, from news reports from Cuba, and from numerous other sources. Freedom House has never sought to create organizations or cells. Nor does Freedom House attempt to recruit or initiate individuals into opposition activity. Instead, Freedom House efforts are intended to assist individuals and grass-roots organizations that are already operating in Cuba, and of whose existence and identity the Government of Cuba is aware. Freedom House does not try to tell these groups what they should do or how they should operate.

Under no circumstances do participants in any Freedom House project, including Cuba, encourage violence, overt or covert anti-State activities, or the overthrow of the Government through non-democratic means. The same applies to those who are selected to serve in the Freedom House delegation to the annual Commission on Human Rights conference in Geneva. Delegates to the Geneva conference are selected on the basis of their commitment to the principles of democracy and peaceful change, as well as on the basis of their first-hand knowledge of current human rights conditions in Cuba and their support for democratic change in Cuba. Indeed, our efforts related to Cuba focus exclusively on the free flow of information and internationally guaranteed rights. The essence of the Freedom House programme is dialogue, discussion and the sharing of ideas. In most societies, such human dialogue would be protected by constitutions or laws and would in no case warrant the attention of the organs of State security. We find it troubling that a small number of States seek to criminalize such normal person-to-person contacts.

Conclusion

In conclusion, the Cuban Democracy Project of Freedom House has been conceived and carried out within the spirit of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights. Its goals are the promotion of dialogue between peoples of different systems and cultures towards the objectives of democracy, the free flow of information and peaceful transition. Its participants are individuals who have proved their commitment to peaceful transition through participation in successful non-violent democratic movements in their own societies and who have made important contributions to the construction of democracy, openness and the rule-of-law in new democratic systems. Freedom House very much wishes that the Cuban Democracy Project could carry out people-to-people contact at all levels — the hallmark of our projects in other societies — and regrets that the policies of the Government of Cuba make this impossible.